

Talking Health Care

When

I'm home in Tennessee, there is one issue at the forefront of everyone's mind: health care. People hear all the rhetoric coming out of Washington and they're both excited and scared. They are excited because so many feel like reform is long overdue with costs spiraling and service declining. But they're also scared because liberals in Congress seem intent on forcing government-run solutions on them that will leave them with one-size-fits-all health care with longer waiting times.

I

believe like-minded colleagues and myself can offer common-sense solutions that will hopefully influence some liberal Democrats to re-think this misguided approach.

I

tell people about the basic principles I've developed to incorporate into any reform package: don't destroy the care people have already; ensure doctors and patients are making all medical decisions; ensure availability of basic health insurance for all Americans; protect against catastrophic health costs; create portability for insurance; make sure everyone has some "skin in the game"; and improve the health insurance industry. I think these principles reflect the values you want in Washington and they're what I will use to judge whatever package is put in front of me.

When

I say that we should ensure all Americans have access to basic health insurance, I'm saying we should get the government out of the way of good care.

Because

health care today is fundamentally controlled at the state level, state governments have enacted different mandates for coverage. For example, in some states, all insurance packages are required to cover fertility treatments, while in others, they're required to cover the most expensive technologies possible for treatment. All these mandates might sound nice when they are

proposed on an individual basis, but when you add them all up, the result is health insurance that costs too much and locks people out of the market. Worse, because every state is different, it is impossible for insurers to sell the same plans across state lines, preventing portability for workers and families.

As Tennesseans, we are trying to show others in our country what we learned from the mistakes of TennCare. Essentially, when you pull back the role of government and reduce regulation, the result is more choice. Unfortunately, Democrats in Congress and the Administration seem to be going in the opposite direction.

Short on details but heavy on government, Democrats have proposed creating a public plan (just a less offensive way of saying "government-run plan") that will compete with private plans. This is their latest effort to inject more government and more regulation into your lives while reducing choice.

Liberals like Ted Kennedy, Henry Waxman, Charles Rangel and Nancy Pelosi claim that you'll be able to keep the health care you have, but this is just a bad re-run for Tennesseans. When TennCARE was created, there were promises that the public plan would be "just another option." The result: 50 percent of individuals who had private plans ended up on the public plan because employers figured out that it was cheaper to get rid of the benefits they offered. Already, estimates like those by the Lewin Group predict as many as 70 percent of individuals with employer-based health insurance will end up on such a public plan because it is subsidized by taxpayers.

Initially, there was a pledge by the Democratic Majority to allow all options on the table and to invite competing ideas. The media has since reported that the key Democrats putting this health care legislation together have since let it be known to health groups that any public criticism will result in losing their seat at the table. This isn't an effort to bring the best ideas to the forefront; it's an effort to force health groups to swallow the bad medicine coming from liberals. Their approach sounds more like government intrusion, new massive taxes, and new mandates.

I'm going to be working overtime in the next few weeks to get health care reform done without allowing Washington bureaucrats to make health care decisions for you.